

The Honorable Michael Burgess  
Chairman  
House Committee on Rules  
2161 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jim McGovern  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Rules  
370 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

As a group of organizations dedicated to taxpayer interests, government accountability, and reining in wasteful Pentagon spending we write to express our support for Amendment #92 to H.R. 8774, the Fiscal Year 2025 Defense Appropriations bill, to preclude funds from being used by Pentagon agencies to draft unfunded priority lists (UPLs), and to request that this bipartisan amendment be included in the rule governing floor debate of the Defense Appropriations bill.

Since 2017, Congress appropriates funding that is extrabudgetary for wish lists requested by military service leaders and combatant commanders. They are not subject to the same requirements as funding included in the Presidential budget request, such as long-term cost assessments and justifications. As a result, available funding for these lists fuels unnecessary spending and subverts the holistic approach to budgeting that the normal budget process was designed to protect.

The funding for these lists also undermines civilian control over the Pentagon budget by sidestepping the Pentagon's civilian leaders, undercutting a fundamental constitutional principle.

Last year, both Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Pentagon Comptroller Mike McCord voiced their opposition to the UPLs.<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), McCord wrote, "The current statutory practice of having multiple individual senior leaders submit priorities for additional funding absent the benefit of weighing costs and benefits across the department is not an effective way to illuminate our top joint priorities."<sup>2</sup>

We wholeheartedly agree. Funds should not be allocated to the military to submit unfunded wish lists that only exacerbates the department's existing financial mismanagement issues, particularly given the growing size and scope of these wish lists. The combined cost of these lists is over \$30 billion, up about 67 percent from last year.<sup>3</sup> INDOPACOM's FY25 list alone is over \$11 billion, up 217 percent from last year.

Moreover, lawmakers are funding items on these lists at the expense of actual priorities included in the budget, and against the wishes of the military service leaders who submitted these requests. For example, Army Chief of Staff General Randy George specifically requested in his unfunded priority list

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<sup>1</sup> Connor Echols, "SecDef Austin calls on Congress to end wasteful 'wish list' gimmick," Responsible Statecraft, March 28, 2023, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/03/28/secdef-austin-calls-on-congressto-end-wasteful-wish-list-gimmick/>.

<sup>2</sup> John M. Donnelly, "Pentagon comes out against law requiring military wish lists," Roll Call, March 28, 2023, <https://rollcall.com/2023/03/28/pentagon-comes-out-against-law-requiring-military-wishlists/?ref=com.devaary.cqrc.rollcall.v01>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

“that these unfunded priorities not displace anything on the Army’s FY25 PB [President’s Budget] request.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, the House NDAA authorizes funding for some of the Army’s unfunded requests while making substantial cuts to the Army’s Procurement, Research, Development, Test and Evaluation (RDT&E), and Operation and Maintenance accounts.<sup>5</sup>

Not providing funds to carry out UPLs will avoid using wasteful and ineffective methods to push the military's top joint priorities. For example, in years when Pentagon spending is capped, these lists come at the expense of actual priorities included in the budget request.

The undersigned organizations have consistently advocated for a fiscally responsible approach to military spending in light of the dire state of the nation’s finances. The Congressional Budget Office predicts that the cost of interest payments on the national debt will surpass military spending this year.<sup>6</sup> Continuing to appropriate funds to wish lists from the military is a recipe for deepening this fiscal crisis, ultimately at the expense of national security.

National security spending should reflect a holistic assessment of needs, and the Pentagon agrees that unfunded priority lists are not helpful in meeting the military’s priorities. Therefore, we ask that you allow a debate and vote on the amendment that denies funds appropriated or otherwise made available to carry out the UPL.

Sincerely,

60 Plus Association  
The American Association of Senior Citizens  
Coalition on Human Needs  
Council for a Livable World  
Demand Progress  
Friends Committee on National Legislation  
National Taxpayers Union  
Peace Action  
Public Citizen  
Project on Government Oversight  
R Street Institute  
Rio Grande Foundation  
Taxpayers for Common Sense  
Taxpayers Protection Alliance

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<sup>4</sup> Randy George, “Letter to House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mike Rogers,” March 2024, <https://www.taxpayer.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/fy25-army-unfunded-priorities-letter.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Gabe Murphy, “Pentagon budgeting shouldn’t look like this,” The Hill, June 1, 2024, <https://thehill.com/opinion/congress-blog/4697854-pentagon-budgeting-shouldnt-look-like-this/>.

<sup>6</sup> Avik Roy, “CBO: Federal Interest Payments Now Exceed Defense Spending,” Forbes, Feb. 7, 2024, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/theapothecary/2024/02/07/cbo-federal-interest-payments-now-exceed-defense-spending/>.